



LETTERS TO A LADY,

EMBODYING

A Popular Sketch of the History of Architecture.

AND THE CHARACTERISTICS OF

THE VARIOUS STYLES WHICH HAVE PREVAILED.*

My dear Scyllah:

I AM delighted to find that my first letter has interested you sufficiently to lead to the suggestion, that the notices of some of the monuments alluded to might have been fuller without being tedious. You will observe, however, if you look back, that I had not completed my remarks on Stonehenge, and we will now, if you please, return for a few minutes to that most extraordinary monument, which, in some respects, has no parallel.

In many parts of the world, including America, large circles of upright stones are to be found, but Stonehenge is peculiar and distinct. Most of the stones there have been worked square by hand,—and on the top of the upright stones, projections, technically called tenons, are formed to fit into indentations, or mortices, in the horizontal stones, so as to confine the whole together.

The diameter of the outer circle is 105 feet; of the second circle, 87 feet. The height of the stones composing the outer circle is nearly 16 feet, their width 7 feet, and their thickness 3 feet; those forming the trilithons are several feet higher; I calculated the weight of one of these to be 19 or 20 tons. Around the whole is a vallum or ditch, 300 feet in diameter, having an opening on one side approached by a wide avenue. Some of the American inclosures are five times as large as this.

The age and purpose of Stonehenge have given rise to a vast deal of discussion. The first published notice of it occurs in the works of Neenius, who wrote in the ninth century, and states that 460 British nobles were murdered at a conference between Vortigern and Hengist in the fifth century, and that Stonehenge was raised to perpetuate their memory. In a Saxon MS. given in Dugdale's "Monasticon," it is even called *Stanhengist*, showing its connection with the leader named. Geoffrey, of Monmouth, adopts the same origin, but brings supernatural agency in aid. Inigo Jones, in an essay on the subject, published in 1655, endeavours to prove that it was a Roman temple of the Tuscan order, dedicated to Cælus: an opinion hardly less unsound than that of Mr. Browne, in 1823, who asserts that it is antediluvian, and rather suspects that Adam had a hand in the direction of it! One writer has asserted that the blocks are not stones, but are formed artificially in moulds! The opinion of the majority is, as you know, that the inclosure was constructed for religious purposes, under the direction of the Druids, at a very early date. Our friend Mr. Britton has a very interesting article on this monument in the *Penny Cyclopædia*.

I remember you were much interested by a paper on this subject read by the Rev. Edward

Duke, at the Salisbury meeting of the Archaeological Institute, in which the author repeated a belief expressed by him three years before, that Stonehenge formed part of a *planetarium*, in connection with Abury and other remains, having a meridional line of not less than thirty-two miles. He saw in the thirty stones and thirty spaces, the thirty days and thirty nights into which anciently the months were divided; and found the inclination of the ecliptic as compared with the plane of the equator, unmistakably indicated by the angle formed by a line drawn from the top of the outer circle to the top of the trilithons. With this, however, I will not meddle. Mr. Squier, an American archaeologist, who has recently visited Stonehenge, has pointed out by a measurement that two detached fallen stones in the avenue originally stood in the centre of this, one behind the other, in a line with the main opening in the outer circle and with the centre of the altar, and maintains that they constituted the veil of the temple, the screen of the sacred place.

How these stones were raised and made to stand exactly their proper height is a matter for discussion, but I fear to detain you upon it. If we stay longer on Salisbury-plain, pleasant place as it is, we shall never get to the end of the long journey which is before us.

The temple at Abury, in the same county, was much more extensive than Stonehenge, but less artificial in arrangement, and probably of even earlier date. It consisted of one large circle enclosing two double circles. The area enclosed at Abury was more than twenty-eight acres. Two avenues of stones, communicating at different parts of the outer circle at Abury, produced the form of a snake, and have led to dissertations showing its connection with *ophiolatry*, or serpent worship—a very ancient superstition in Egypt and the East, and to which the primitive Druids were addicted. Although with us the symbol of the evil spirit, the serpent was recognised in India and Egypt, and also in Greece, as a friendly deity. Pliny describes the serpent's egg, which he says was worn by the Druids as their distinguishing badge. Many marvellous powers were ascribed to it. Some have conjectured that the temples of which I have been speaking, as well as Carnac, in Brittany, and others, were dedicated to the united worship of the sun and the serpent, and that their form was emblematical of the combination. An "intelligent foreigner" who, gazing back at night from Hyde Park along the serpentine line of light which the lamps up Piccadilly produce, found in that a proof that the Londoners of to-day are *ophiolatres*, would have a good ground for his belief as some of the theorists on this point.

To a more extended disquisition than this,

cairns, cromlechs, and logan stones might be noticed, although of later date than other structures of which we have to speak.

The Dolmen or Cromlech, a flat stone supported on three or four upright stones not contiguous, was at one time considered to be an altar: the fact is, however, it merely marks the burial-place of the rich, as the simple barrow does that of the more lowly. In some cases it was covered by a barrow. Kite Cotty House, near Maidstone, in Kent, is a well-known example of a cromlech. The top stone of this is 12 feet long and more than 9 feet broad. The logan stones, or rocking stones, found in various parts of the country, are doubtless natural productions. The softer parts of the stones have been worn away by the weather, leaving a mass poised so accurately on a point, that very little strength is sufficient to rock it, although to shift it from its position would be very difficult. It is said, with what truth I will not decide, that these stones were made a test of innocence in early times. Mason, a dramatic poet, has a passage describing the ordeal, which occurs to me. He says—

—Behold yon huge

And unheven mass of living adamant
Which, poised by magic, rests its central weight
On ponder pointed rock. Fixed as it seems,
Such are its strange and virtuous properties.
It moves obsequious to the slightest touch
Of him whose breast is pure; but,—to the traitor
Although a giant's prowess nerve his arm,
It stands as firm as Snowden.

It is not necessary to say that the result rested with the presiding priest, and might be produced by a very small wedge. We must take care, however, not to outrun our subject. Many pleasant paths for examination open out of the high road, but if we were to pursue them all, we should soon get astray from the main line. We must return to an earlier period.

Amongst the earliest recorded facts connected with the history of architecture after the Deluge, is the foundation of the city and tower of Babel, shall we say, 2200 B.C. You will remember it is stated that, as the people journeyed from the East,—and let me remind you, in passing, that the course of improvement has been in a singularly marked manner, from the East to the West, or more strictly, the North-west, as, from Asia-Minor to Greece, to Italy, to Gaul, and to Britain; and is so indeed in many modern towns;—as they journeyed from the East they found a plain in the land of Shinar, and settled there. Here, prompted by a desire "to make a name" (the desire still haunts some of us), an ambition to be known to posterity, they burnt clay to make bricks, and with the slime or bitumen, of which there were natural fountains, they began to build a city, and a tower to reach to Heaven. Babel, you know, was in the kingdom of Nimrod, called the mighty hunter, who afterwards built Nineveh. Josephus terms him the founder of the city of *Babylon*, and Bryant says, he was sometimes called Bel or Belus, but this title was applied to many.

Now concerning the progress of this last-named city. Babylon, the chief city of Assyria, the deepest obscurity prevails, even more than might be expected, notwithstanding its remote date. Queen Semiramis is said to have surrounded it with high walls, and to have erected a lofty monument to Belus about 2,000 years before our era; but there are so many contradictory opinions as to the time at which this queen lived, even to the extent of 1,500 years, that it is difficult to arrive at a satisfactory conclusion upon it. More recently it has even been argued by Sir William Betham, that this queen never existed at all, and that her history is an allegory showing the power of maritime commerce! What are we to believe? you will say. For my own part I have strong faith in a real *lre Semiramis*.

Herodotus, who wrote about 450 years B.C. describes Babylon at some length, but speaks with uncertainty even then of the date of its foundation. He says (Clio, c. lxxviii.) that it was of the greatest strength and fame in the Assyrian empire, and excelled in internal beauty and magnificence whatever had come within his knowledge. It was a perfect square

* No. 2. See p. 100, ante.